DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 357 900 RC 019 124

AUTHOR Matthews, Bruce E.
TITLE Does Outdoor & Environmental Education Have a Role in Multicultural Education?
INSTITUTION Coalition for Education in the Outdoors, Cortland, NY.
PUB DATE [Dec 92]
NOTE 7p.
AVAILABLE FROM Coalition for Education in the Outdoors, Box 2000, S.U.C.C., Cortland, NY 13045 (free).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Camping; Cultural Differences; *Cultural Pluralism; *Environmental Education; *Intergroup Relations; Minority Groups; *Multicultural Education; *Outdoor Education; Values

ABSTRACT

Outdoor and environmental education can play a vital role in multicultural education. Environmental education can promote global perspectives by exploring the common interests of different racial and ethnic groups in finding ways to live equitably and sustainably on earth. Outdoor and environmental educators can encourage racial and ethnic diversity among their members. To do so, they must focus on how environmental education can help meet the agenda of individuals and groups of color. Environmental education must also recognize the need to consider all human systems and cultures as factors in environmental problems and their solution. Outdoor education can offer programs that bring individuals together to share the strengths and uniqueness of people and build a common base of experience. Organized camping has recently played a role in building trust and breaking down barriers among interracial groups of teens. It is imperative that both environmental and outdoor educators find ways to address the environmental issues and outdoor recreational preferences of all racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. A list of 31 references and resources concludes the article. (KS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED357900

DOES OUTDOOR & ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION HAVE A ROLE IN MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION?

by: Bruce E. Matthews

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Bruce E. Matthews

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

RC019124

Does Outdoor & Environmental Education Have a Role in Multicultural Education?

By Bruce E. Matthews

Editor's note: multicultural education is a buzzword on today's educational scene. We thought readers would appreciate a consideration of outdoor and environmental education's potential role. The views presented are those of the author. Comments are welcome.

"Black teardrops fall from red-rimmed eye sockets. Half of the ancient buffalo skull is painted brown, and the other half white. The inside of the mouth is yellow. At the base of the skull is a bit of green.

"My grandfather, James Holding Eagle, was a Mandan priest," begins Lydia Sage-Chase, herself a Mandan corn priestess. "He told me the story of the vision, as painted on this skull. It is a prophesy passed down through the generations by my people."

"The brown represents our mother earth, and the green the plants that we need—that keep us all going and support all life," she continued. "The white is for the white people, for there are so many of them. The yellow mouth represents the yellow races, for they have the potential to swallow us all. The black tears represent the black people and the way they have been mistreated-the Creator feels sorry at this but knows of their power and strength. The red eyes are for the native Americans, for their ability to see and foretell the future."

Lydia Sage-Chase looked out at the endless North Dakota horizon. "The prophesy is to show that all races must come together and work together. If we don't, we will destroy each other. We must become stronger together and forget racism and work together to support the earth and what sustains us all."

As the twentieth century relinquishes its grasp, the world is being forced from many directions to seek new ways of viewing things from a more global perspective. The western Caucasian, male-dominated 'majority' viewpoint is increasingly being challenged. The old metaphor depicting U.S. society as a 'melting pot' is slowly giving way to a new paradigm, better symbolized by a rainbow. No longer content with being told "we're all the same inside" and no longer accepting assimilation as the ultimate goal, racial, ethnic, and cultural minorities, as well as disenfranchised groups such as persons with disabilities, women, gays and lesbians, and the rural poor are rejecting the norm and breaking new ground. They are finding ways of celebrating their differences and the unique contributions each can make to a society in desperate need of the rich diversity each can bring.

Do outdoor and environmental educators have a role to play in this process? Should the profession be concerned with multicultural education? Before considering this, a brief overview of multiculturalism is in order.

When viewed from a historic perspective, responses to human diversity have typically included genocide, "ethnic cleansing," ghettoization, relegation to reservations, and apartheid. In the U.S., integration and efforts at assimilation (melting pot theory) resulted from the civil rights movement in the 50's and 60's. The reverse discrimination that sometimes occurred through affirmative action led to retrenchment and reactionism, especially in the 80's, as the white-dominated system resisted. The rejection of assimilation by minority groups (rejecting a system defined in white terms— i.e. "let them into our world") and the reaction to reverse discrimination have led to calls for a new way of thinking about diversity, a forging of new directions for the future. This new effort is referred to today as multiculturalism.

While multicultural education itself is being hotly debated by many (Schlesinger, Jr., 1991; Cottrol, 1991), it is not the intent of this author to justify the need for multicultural education, nor examine its scope and full means of accomplishment. The need for a better understanding and acceptance of and appreciation for diversity in society is documented daily and painfully in the media, needing no further elaboration here. The purpose of this paper is to suggest that, assuming the validity of multicultural education, outdoor and environmental education can play a vital role in its accomplishment.

What is "multicultural education?" Dr. James A. Banks, Director of the Center for Multicultural Education at the University of Washington, Seattle, suggests that multiculturalism offers a new way of viewing E Pluribus Unum. He says "you cannot take the many and make them one by imposing the one on the many. People on the margins must participate. We must validate their dreams and struggles, and they must participate in shaping the *unum*.

"So many...don't feel a part of this country..." Banks continues. "Yet all our fates are tied together. We talk about kids who are at risk, but I think we are all at risk if we don't create a society that is united within a framework of shared values, like democracy and equality.... And that is what multicultural education is all about. It's really an education for freedom, freedom for all of us" (Banks, 1992, p. 21-3).

The emphasis Banks places on shared values is important. Clearly, finding the places where these values are shared offers the best hope for the future and, not coincidentally, a tremendous opportunity for outdoor and environmental educators to be part of the process.

Environmental education is beginning to respond in a number of ways. The World Congress on Education and Communication on Environment and Development, held at Toronto last fall, brought

"The old metaphor depicting U.S. society as a 'melting pot' is slowly giving way to a new paradigm, better symbolized by a rainbow."

RC 01912

Does Outdoor & Environmental Education...

together numerous diverse groups from many regions of the globe, all sharing a common interest in finding ways to live equitably and sustainably on the earth.

Environmental educators are, increasingly, viewing people, and the diversity among peoples both intra and interculturally, as a critical part of understanding and preserving ecosystems and the biosphere. In the past, and in some cases still today, environmental educators used overly simplistic models of ecosystems, which tended to lump all peoples into one category-humankind. Sometimes they even chose to exclude people from the equation entirely. Today the more forward-thinking environmental educators are seeing the need to understand and include all human systems and cultures, in all their diversity, in any consideration of environmental problem resolution. More than lip service is being given to the idea of a global village. Tropical rainforest deforestation cannot be fully understood, or stopped, without fully understanding all the people factors involved as well as the biophysical aspects. This includes indigenous peoples, ranchers, peasants, minority groups, government, the Catholic church, landowners, business and political interests, and so on.

An excellent example of this new paradigm is offered by the Three Circles Center for Multi-Cultural Environmental Education. According to Running-Grass, director of the center, the three circles represent the interaction of three systems of thinking-ecology, community, and culture. "We must learn to talk about all three areas in the context of each other," he stated recently. "The place where all three intersect in the center needs to be fully explored and defined" (Running-Grass 1992). Clearly, this multicultural environmental education program is at the forefront in forging new ground.

One example of how this can work is by examining the models offered by indigenous peoples. These cultures have evolved as peoples uniquely suited to living in harmony with the places where they are found. Going beyond the Indian 'wanna-be's,' inspired perhaps by movies such as *Dances With Wolves*, and going beyond the popular new age interest in Native American spirituality, there lies a model for sustainable living in harmony with nature. Whether considering the aboriginal peoples of Australia, the Congo, or the Arctic, each has evolved in a unique and sustainable way of living with their environment. Multicultural environmental education is essential in presenting the models offered by these peoples as alternatives to the collision course with reality along which today's mass culture catapults itself.

One problem frequently cited for why environmental education fails to more fully embrace the multicultural approach is the lack of racial and often ethnic diversity among outdoor or environmental educators. A glance around at most outdoor-environmental educators' gatherings amply confirms this. Memberships in mainstream environmental and conservation organizations is also primarily Anglo (Berle, 1987), leading some to conclude, erroneously, that non-Anglos are not interested in the environment or environmental issues. The 1991 National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, in bringing together almost 400 people of color leaders concerned with the environment, should have obliterated that criticism once and for all. So, too, should the diversity represented by the World Environmental Summit at Rio last June and at ECO-ED in Toronto in October. And certainly the People of Color Environmental Groups Directory, with a listing of over 200 groups identified as having an environmental focus, offers plenty of evidence contradicting the myth of lack of interest in the environment (Bullard, 1992).

"... you cannot take the many and make them one by imposing the one on the many."
— James A. Banks

The Rev. Jesse Jackson: "You cannot separate environment from empowerment. Toxic waste dumps are put in communities where people are the poorest, the least organized, the least registered to vote. You cannot breathe free if you are choking on pesticides. You cannot breathe free if your water is contaminated. It's not just a matter of science and legislation. It's a matter of morality" (Jackson, 1991).

The Conservation Fund, a non-profit organization established to advance land and water conservation, has called for expanding the national conservation constituency to include leaders from all racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, including low income communities and the rural poor. The Conservation Fund states "Virtually none of the mainstream [environmental] groups- regardless of location, scope, or size- works effectively with, or tries to include people of color, the rural poor, and the disenfranchised" (Jordan, 2).

How can environmental educators assist with these efforts and get more non-Anglos into their ranks? A study was conducted by Katherine James and Leo McAvoy to determine the factors influencing persons of color who did choose to work in environmental education (James & McAvoy, 1992). The researchers found three "primary paths" by which persons of color became involved. These included: an interest in science, leading to study in the environmental sciences, and then using environmental education as a means of sharing this interest; positive experiences in the outdoors that predisposed individuals to use environmental education as a means of sharing this enjoyment as well as working for preserving future opportunities; and activist work in combatting environmental degradation in one's own community, leading to involvement in

Does Outdoor & Environmental Education...

environmental education as a way of fighting this degradation (16-17).

The environmental education movement would do well to focus in these areas, developing active recruitment strategies. However, the focus must be on how environmental education can help meet the agenda of these individuals and groups of color, not on why they should be helping environmental educators with some predetermined E.E. agenda. James and McAvoy found that environmental educators of color often shared a common view of environmentalism in which social justice plays a major role (17), supporting Jesse Jackson's comments about environmental racism and the linkages with social justice. Mainstream environmental education must take note of this and act accordingly.

Environmental education needs also to address the environmental issues of these cultures where the issues interface with those cultures, not in some culturally irrelevant manner. A spotted owl is of little consequence to a mother whose babies are being poisoned by the lead-based paint on her apartment walls. Environmental education must include community-based issues, often involving health, which are of much more immediate concern to the often poor and disenfranchised communities of color than preservation of wilderness areas and endangered species.

According to Katherine James, "the absence of racial diversity poses a serious threat to the environmental movement...If [this trend] continues, environmental issues will be the concern of an increasingly small minority. Environmental advocacy needs to be unconstrained by ethnicity and culture..." (James, 1991).

In addition to the more specific ways in which environmental education can respond, through introducing global perspectives, combatting environmental racism, encouraging understanding of how all cultures view the environment, finding the shared values and commitment that do exist among groups, and extending an appreciation for ecological diversity to include a diversity of peoples (Matthews, 1992), outdoor education can be used to bring people together, identifying common interests, and developing appreciation for each other.

Action socialization experiences such as Project Adventure, challenge/adventure education, and similar programs are designed to bring together individuals, sharing the strengths and uniquenesses of people, building a common base of experience. Wilderness Inquiry in Minnesota takes this approach with persons with varying abilities, mixing different ability/disability areas with each trip group. More focus could be given within these types of programs on promoting an appreciation for the differences and for diversity among peoples by using this approach in a multicultural context.

Organized camping has long been recognized as a tremendous influence in helping people get to know and appreciate others, including those who are different from oneself (Miranda, 1990; Ohle, 1990; Webber & Walker-Thoth, 1990; Jordan, 1990). Camping as a method recently has been used for the express purpose of building trust and breaking down barriers among interracial groups of teens (Punske, 1992). In promoting multiculturalism, the organized camping movement can play an important and more visible role.

"Environmental educators of color often shared a common view of environmentalism in which social justice plays a major role..."

However, the "feel-good" approach too often used to put a band-aid on racism should not be the norm. Sara Bullard, editor of Teaching Tolerance magazine, describes a phenomenon where interracial solidarity is achieved in some situations, but doesn't last. "It seems we can share in the exuberance of something that takes us beyond our individual selves, but we cannot share ourselves," she writes. "We can dance but we can't talk. We don't speak our minds when racially-charged topics arise. We don't expose our particular confusions and pain. We don't take risks, we don't invite inquiry, and we don't search for common ground." We consent to this racial isolation, Bullard says, "not because we don't want to connect, but because we don't know how." (Bullard, 1992). Organized camping and outdoor educators should address this, making sure their programs promote the deeper connection, and go beyond the feel-good to the do-right.

Outdoor educators can help facilitate multicultural understanding by seeking out those areas where a confluence of interest exists among communities of color and others with regard to outdoor activities. By finding a common, shared interest, barriers are more easily broken and crossed.

An example of this is fishing. Consistently, fishing as an outdoor activity receives strong interest across all racial areas (Blahna, 1992; Missouri Department of Conservation, 1990; Murdock et al; Ditton 1992). Reasons for going fishing and for participating in other outdoor activities (Simcox & Pfister, 1991; Floyd & Gramann, 1992; Chavez, 1992; Dwyer, 1992) may vary from one racial or ethnic group to another (Blahna, 1992) just as it does among geographic regions within the general population; yet the common bond of fishing is there. Outdoor educators should see and act on this very real opportunity to promote multicultural appreciation through exploring these shared interests.

This is not to imply that conflicts would not occur. With expectations and preferences varying among groups, conflict will likely arise. An example of this is the growing catch and release

Does Outdoor & Environmental Education...

ethic fast becoming the norm among traditional white anglers. This conflicts sharply with the traditional Asian norm that fish of any size are kept and eaten. Resolving these conflicts may be a bit more than most outdoor educators bargain for; yet there remains the opportunity and in fact imperative to work for resolution as outdoor education reaches out to insure safe and appropriate uses of the outdoors by all. Remember, too, that one important motivator for non-Anglo choices to become environmental educators was the positive outdoor experience.

Is there a role for outdoor and environmental education in multicultural and diversity issues? More than a role exists. It is an imperative for both environmental and outdoor educators to find ways to address the environmental issues and outdoor recreational preferences of all racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. It is an imperative to find the common grounds and confluences of interest among all groups, and together move in new directions, directions far more likely to result in a truly global village committed to environmental sustainability and social justice for a real tomorrow for all of our children. ■

The lowering clouds had darkly threatened rain all day. As evening approached, a stiff wind rolled across the North Dakota prairie; nothing stopping it for a thousand miles but a tiny knoll perched over the east bank of the Missouri River. It was the site of Looking Place Village, a Mandan town occupied until 1780. We were meeting there to feel and celebrate the power of the place.

Earlier that day, Lydia had called, discouraged at the weather's bleak outlook, suggesting that perhaps we'd better meet at her home instead. We decided, however, to give it a try anyway.

Jerry White Cloud and his family were waiting as we drove up, expecting that at any moment pile-driven raindrops would start splatting against our windshield. Jerry, a Sioux elder, had agreed to share some of his songs. We exchanged introductions and climbed, wind-whipped, to the center of the site, the place where the village's holy shrine had been located.

Jerry and his son beat on hand-held drums, singing songs in their language, then explaining them. Lydia said a Mandan prayer, blessing the place, as had her ancestors. We talked, about the spirit and power of places, and of this spot. I sang a song, an Appalachian round; I have a tradition of singing it to the tops of mountains upon reaching their summits. It didn't seem out of place.

We were members of three cultures meeting on a hilltop, at a sacred place, sharing from each of our traditions, finding common ground. It was a special moment.

Later we went and had ice cream. No one felt the need to mention that the wind had died completely as soon as Jerry had started to sing.

Sources

Banks, James. 1992. "It's Up To Us." Teaching Tolerance. I:2, pp. 21-3.

Berle, Peter A.A.. 1987. "Saving the World." Audubon Magazine. 89:6.

Blahna, Dale J. 1992. "Comparing the Preferences of Black, Asian, Hispanic, and White Fishermen at Moraine Hills State Park, Illinois." in Proceedings of the Symposium on Social Aspects and Recreation Research, Feb. 19-22, 1992, Ontario, California. Gen. Tech. Report PSW-GTR-132. Albany, CA: Pacific Southwest Research Station, Forest Service, U.S.D.A., 96 pp.

Bullard, Sara. 1992. "We Can Dance But We Can't Talk." Teaching Tolerance. I:2 , p. 4.

Bullard, Robert D. 1992. People of Color Environmental Groups Directory. Riverside, CA: University of California, Riverside, 82 pp.

Chavez, Debbie, ed.. 1991. Recreation Research Update . 3:2 , p. 1.

Chavez, Debbie, ed.. 1992. "Ethnic Group Activities: A Survey of Los Angeles Residents." Recreation Research Update . 6:1 , p. 1.

Chavez, Debbie, ed.. 1992. Proceedings of the Symposium on Social Aspects and Recreation Research, Feb. 19-22, 1992, Ontario, California. Gen. Tech. Report PSW-GTR-132. Albany, CA: Pacific Southwest Research Station, Forest Service, U.S.D.A., 96 pp.

Cottrol, Robert. 1991."...And Ideas About How To Do It Right." American Educator. 15:3 ,p. 15-16.

Ditton, R.B. 1992. "Your Changing World." Unpublished presentation at the statewide management staff meeting, Division of Fish and Wildlife, N.Y. State Department of Environmental Conservation.

Dwyer, John F.. 1992. "Outdoor Recreation Participation: Blacks, Whites, Hispanics, and Asians in Illinois. In Proceedings of the Symposium on Social Aspects and Recreation Research, Feb. 19-22, 1992, Ontario, California. Gen. Tech. Report PSW-GTR-132. Albany, CA: Pacific Southwest Research Station, Forest Service, U.S.D.A., 96 pp.

Floyd, Myron and L. Gramann. 1991. Cited in Chavez, Debbie, ed.. Recreation Research Update . 3:2 , p. 2.

Jackson, Jesse. 1991." The Environment: Making Lions Lay Down With Lambs". Trilogy. (Winter 1991) p.156-158.

James, Katherine and L. McAvoy. 1992. "A Qualitative Study of Factors Influencing Racial Diversity in Environmental Education: Preliminary Results." In Proceedings of the Symposium on Social Aspects and Recreation Research, Feb. 19-22, 1992, Ontario, California. Gen. Tech. Report PSW-GTR-132. Albany, CA: Pacific Southwest Research Station, Forest Service, U.S.D.A., 96 pp.

James, Katherine. 1991. "Increasing Racial Diversity: A Philosophy for Change." Legacy. 2:2, p.16.

Jordan, Charles. 1991. "Toward Environmental Integration." Common

Does Outdoor & Environmental Education...

Ground. 2:2 , p. 2.

Jordan, Deborah J. 1990. "Celebrating the Rainbow." Camping Magazine. 63:2 (Nov.-Dec. 1990), p. 40.

Matthews, Bruce. 1992. "Diversity and Outdoor-Environmental Education: "Something there is that doesn't love a wall." Taproot, Newsletter of the Coalition for Education in the Outdoors. Fall 1992, p.4.

Missouri Department of Conservation. 1990. "Urban Missouri ans' Interests in Fish, Forests and Wildlife: Results of a 1989 Citizen Survey." Missouri Department of Conservation Public Profile 3-90, 13 pp.

Miranda, Wilma. 1990. "Organized Camping's Honorable Tradition: Safeguarding Diversity Through Community." Camping Magazine. 63:2 (Nov.-Dec. 1990), p. 16.

Murdock, S. H., K. Backman, R.B. Ditton, M.N. Hoque and D. Ellis. In Press. Demographic Change in the U.S. in the 1990s and the 21st Century: Implications for Fisheries Management.

Ohle, Liz. 1990. "Putting Everyone in the Picture: Countering Homophobia in the Camp Setting." Camping Magazine. 63:2 (Nov.-Dec. 1990), p. 30.

Punske, Lori and A. Montoya. 1992. "Anytown". Teaching Tolerance. 1:2 (Fall 1992), p. 58.

Running-Grass. 1992. Personal notes. North east Aquatic Resources Education Conference, Jackson, NH, Sept. 1, 1992.

Schlesinger, Jr., Arthur M. 1991. "The Disuniting of America." American Educator. 15:3, p.14, 21-33.

Webber, Mary S. and Daphne Walker-Thoth. 1990. "Camp Can Make a World of Difference." Camping Magazine. 63:2 (Nov.-Dec. 1990), p. 36.

Resources:

Teaching Tolerance, 400 Washington Ave., Montgomery, AL 36104 (A biannual magazine available free to educators)

MultiCultural Education: Issues and Perspectives, by James A. Banks and Cherry A. McGee Banks. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1989.

Teaching Strategies for Ethnic Studies, 5th edition, by James A. Banks. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1991.

"Wildland Recreation and Intercultural Communication." An audio cassette learning program focused on management strategies for better intercultural communications. 1991. Available from Hummingbird Camera Systems, Inc., 933 6th St., Suite A, Hermosa Beach, CA 90254.

Three Circles Center for Multi-Cultural Environmental Education
P.O. Box 1946
Sausalito, CA 94965
415-331-4540.